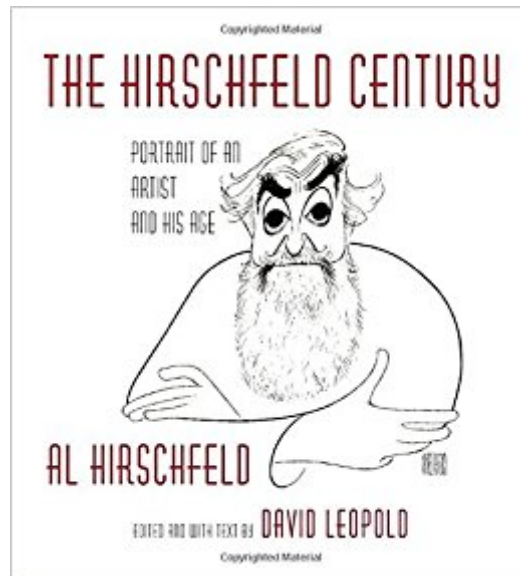




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# The Hirschfeld Century: Portrait Of An Artist And His Age



## Synopsis

I am down to a pencil, a pen, and a bottle of ink. I hope one day to eliminate the pencil. Al Hirschfeld redefined caricature and exemplified Broadway and Hollywood, enchanting generations with his mastery of line. His art appeared in every major publication during nine decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as on numerous book, record, and program covers; film posters and publicity art; and on fifteen U.S. postage stamps. Now, *The Hirschfeld Century* brings together for the first time the artist's extraordinary eighty-two-year career, revealed in more than 360 of his iconic black-and-white and color drawings, illustrations, and photographs—his influences, his techniques, his evolution from his earliest works to his last drawings, and with a biographical text by David Leopold, Hirschfeld authority, who, as archivist to the artist, worked side by side with him and has spent more than twenty years documenting the artist's extraordinary output. Here is Hirschfeld at age seventeen, working in the publicity department at Goldwyn Pictures (1920–1921), rising from errand boy to artist; his year at Universal (1921); and, beginning at age eighteen, art director at Selznick Pictures, headed by Louis Selznick (father of David O.) in New York. We see Hirschfeld, at age twenty-one, being influenced by the stylized drawings of Miguel Covarrubias, newly arrived from Mexico (they shared a studio on West Forty-Second Street), whose caricatures appeared in many of the most influential magazines, among them *Vanity Fair*. We see, as well, how Hirschfeld's friendship with John Held Jr. (Held's drawings literally created the look of the Jazz Age) was just as central as Covarrubias to the young artist's development, how Held's thin line affected Hirschfeld's early caricatures. Here is the Hirschfeld century, from his early doodles on the backs of theater programs in 1926 that led to his work for the drama editors of the *New York Herald Tribune* (an association that lasted twenty years) to his receiving a telegram from *The New York Times*, in 1928, asking for a two-column drawing of Sir Harry Lauder, a Scottish vaudeville singing sensation making one of his (many) farewell tours, an assignment that began a collaboration with the *Times* that lasted seventy-five years, to Hirschfeld's theater caricatures, by age twenty-five, a drawing appearing every week in one of four different New York newspapers. Here, through Hirschfeld's pen, are Ethel Merman, Benny Goodman, Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Katharine Hepburn, the Marx Brothers, Barbra Streisand, Elia Kazan, Mick Jagger, Ella Fitzgerald, Laurence Olivier, Martha Graham, et al. . . . Among the productions featured: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Rent*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Hirschfeld drew five posters for the original release), *Gone with the Wind*, *The Sopranos*, and more. Here as well are his brilliant portraits of writers, politicians, and the like, among them Ernest Hemingway (a pal from 1920s

Paris), Tom Wolfe, Charles de Gaulle, Nelson Mandela, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and every president from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Bill Clinton. Sumptuous and ambitious, a book that gives us, through images and text, a Hirschfeld portrait of an artist and his age.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Al Hirschfeld  
THE HIRSCHFELD CENTURY  
Edited and with text by David Leopold  
“Gloriously illustrated . . . star-studded, anecdote-rich, critically clarifying, and thoroughly enlightening.”  
-Booklist (Starred Review)  
“Lively . . . comprehensive . . . passionate . . . a diverting study of a towering figure in 20th century illustration.”  
-Publishers Weekly  
“Richly illustrated . . . An intelligent, carefully representative look at Hirschfeld’s work that ably shows why the artist deserves to be remembered today.”  
-Kirkus

AL HIRSCHFELD was born in St. Louis in 1903, grew up in New York City, and studied at the

Art Students League. His work is in the collections of many museums, among them the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Harvard Fogg Museum. Hirschfeld died in 2003 at the age of ninety-nine. DAVID LEOPOLD was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and studied at the University of Pittsburgh. He has organized several landmark exhibitions on a variety of aspects of Hirschfeld's art, among them Hirschfeld's Hollywood for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He lives near Philadelphia.

<http://www.AlHirschfeldFoundation.org>

If you buy this book as a coffee table accessory or a gift, you won't be disappointed by the quality of its German printing, construction, and the beautiful reproductions of Hirschfeld's works. But you'll be selling yourself short if you don't read some of the wonderful stories inside. For over twenty-five years, author David Leopold has worked with Al Hirschfeld and his estate, including thirteen years working directly with Mr. Hirschfeld as his archivist. Throughout their many years of collaboration and friendship, Hirschfeld helped Leopold catalog not merely the works, but the personal stories behind each piece. As such, this book represents a history of an artist, of Broadway theater, and the twentieth century itself. The book not only chronicles the art with extraordinary attention to detail, but with love and admiration for Mr. Hirschfeld and his family. Each chapter is devoted to a specific decade of Hirschfeld's career, creating a well-organized and detailed chronology which can be easily accessed and enjoyed. No need to read the book from beginning to end; simply hop to your favorite decade and marvel at the illustrations. Virtually every one of the hundreds of drawings is accompanied by a story which Mr. Hirschfeld told the author, making each drawing come alive. This work spans Hirschfeld's career with attention to detail seldom seen in works such as these. Indeed, it's unlikely that any other author could approach this body of art and provide the perspective and level of detail which Leopold shares with his readers. This book makes a wonderful gift to anyone who loves art, theater, or history.

I always thought the idea of a coffee table art book published on Kindle would be a disaster. Photographs and paintings are almost always muddy on this small screen. The exception: THE HIRSCHFELD CENTURY: Portrait of an Artist and his Age by David Leopold. In his 88-year career Al Hirschfeld (1803-2003) was a bon vivant, party animal, brilliant conversationalist and sheer delight to be with. He was also the greatest caricaturist in the history of the world, who rendered dizzying variety of line portraits of every person of importance in theater, film, television, literature, the arts and slew of other professions. Quite simply Hirschfeld's line

drawings hundreds of them reproduce beautifully on Kindle. For example late in his life, Al sired a daughter Nina who was the apple of his eye, and whose name appeared in hundreds of his drawings. The Sunday morning game for millions of newspaper readers was to scrutinize Hirschfeld's latest work and find the NINA hidden in the folds of a dress, in a tangle of hair, in wallpaper, backgrounds, curtains or an amazingly distorted face. Because so much of his work is precise line drawings, Kindle readers can happily play the NINA game. This is amazing. As well as presenting Hirschfeld's extraordinary artwork, David Leopold adds splendid sugar and spice to the narrative how each work was conceived as well as the gossipy, readable stories of his life, world travels and friendships made with his subjects. Particularly fascinating was Hirschfeld's epiphany the magical moment he came to understand what his art was all about. It happened in Bali. "The Balinese sun seemed to bleach out all color, leaving everything in pure line. The people became line drawings walking around," Al wrote of the experience. "I think it is no accident that rich, lush painting flourishes in the fog of Europe, while graphic art from Egypt across Persia to India and all the way to the Pacific Islands is influenced by the sun . . . it was in Bali that my attraction to drawing blossomed into an enduring love affair with line." . . . This was Al's decisive moment as an artist, the moment that there would forever be a "before" and an after. "David Leopold You have my ironclad guarantee this Kindle masterpiece will continually awe you not only on the first reading but again and again as you go back to savor these hundreds of spectacular drawings. I love it! You will too! It's a stunner.

What a treat this book is! Having "grown up" with Hirschfeld (didn't we all), this is a treasure trove of the artist's works and each offering is worth a study. It's fascinating to watch the Hirschfeld style develop. In the earliest of his art work there is little indication as to how his "signature" pieces would turn out. But I was struck at once by "The Grand Street Follies" of 1927 where one can distinctly see the future artist's inimitable form taking shape. Perhaps it wasn't until the 1950s that Hirschfeld came into the style with which we remember him most, and the wonderful poster for "My Fair Lady" is one I recall from my earliest years. Who could do a better Carol Channing? No one. And that goes for all the other people he drew. Sui generis is exactly the term to describe him. A challenge to the reader...look at many of his drawings before reading the accompanying descriptions and guess

whom he represents in them. That's a lot of fun. My only quibble with the book is that the prose is often broken up by the artwork so it's not an easy flow. But that's minor compared to the terrific compilation provided by editor David Leopold. I highly recommend "The Hirschfeld Century".

The only artist I never get tired of is Al Hirschfeld, whose enormous output chronicling American entertainment (mainly theatrical) continued until he passed away on the cusp of 100 in 2003. This magnificent volume contains a marvelous selection of his work, each example of which is as fresh and surprising as when he first put pen to paper, and is supplemented by David Leopold's superb text outlining Al's life and art. My principle quibble is with the editorial decision to provide lengthy captions for many pictures that replicate information already in the text, and that often interrupt the flow of the narrative as one stops to read them before picking up the textual thread a page or two later. Nonetheless, no theatre lover (nor film lover, for that matter) should be without this on their shelf or coffee table. If you're pondering a gift for anyone who loves the world of 20th-century entertainment, especially Broadway, you need look no further. This one's a no-brainer all the way!

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